

A FRONTIER INTERLUDE: TIMOTHY PICKERING AND THE WYOMING VALLEY

IN 1785 Colonel Timothy Pickering, the honest and hard-working Quartermaster General of the United States Army, stepped down from the office he had filled with distinction since his appointment in 1780 and returned once more to civilian life.¹ Nearly a decade had passed since Pickering had left his native town of Salem, Massachusetts, to lend his energies to the patriot army of George Washington. Having become accustomed to the tempo and opportunities of life around Philadelphia, he now looked upon this region as his home and sought to make a success as a commission merchant in the thriving metropolis, transacting business there for his merchant friends of New England. But depression times were at hand, competition was stiff, and Pickering was dissatisfied with his fortunes. He sought lucrative government appointments without success, and like many another American of that day his eyes turned hopefully towards the frontier.²

The American frontier had been constrained by the activities of the British and the Indians during the Revolutionary War. But now in the post war period pent-up energies had broken loose and were swiftly expanding the reach of settlement into the wilderness. But it was a turbulent period. Interstate jealousy and strife, inadequately controlled by the weak Articles of Confederation, generated a host of land and boundary disputes that hampered peaceful, western development. One such area of conflict was the Wyoming Valley of Pennsylvania, where settlers from Connecticut vied with

Pennsylvania claimants for the possession of the valley's rich lands.

In 1785 the Wyoming Valley embraced a large area of land along the north-central border of Pennsylvania, then a frontier region. It spread out from both sides of the eastern branch of the Susquehannah River, with its center around present-day Wilkes-Barre.³ On the floor of the valley were the Shawnee Plains, extremely fertile and frequently enriched by the alluvial deposits of the spring floods; the plains were rather narrow and were surrounded by high hills that afforded good timberland as well as the key to the Valley's later development, rich anthracite coal deposits.

With its fine resources and navigable water-link to the sea, the Valley offered a tempting reward to the frontiersmen of New England, situated as it was in the path of westward migration. But it was to be a long time before the region was to blossom forth in prosperous development, for the conflicts of man were to turn his hands too frequently from his conquest of nature.

The valley suffered grievously in 1778 from an Indian massacre, when over 300 settlers lost their lives; but it suffered even more seriously from the series of disputes over the land title to the area.⁴ The basis of the trouble lay in the conflicting grants of the colonial charters of Pennsylvania and Connecticut. The latter had been given a "sea to sea" grant in 1662 by Charles the Second, but a portion of this territory was later granted by the same monarch to the Penns in 1681. For years Connecticut made no serious complaint nor did she endeavor to assert her rights in the disputed area by settlement. But in 1753 a group of Connecticut men formed themselves into a body called the Susquehannah Company and planned a settlement in the Wyoming

Valley.⁵ They purchased title to the area from the Indians, though the latter had already granted pre-emption rights to Pennsylvania. In 1762 the company undertook its first settlement, but Indian attacks thwarted their efforts until 1769, when the first permanent settlement was established.⁶

But though the Indians were temporarily driven away, the Pennsylvanians were not. The latter colony sent armed forces into the area to drive out the "intruders." Skirmishes resulted which brought suffering, damage, and loss to the inhabitants and retarded the development of the Valley but failed to settle the issue one way or another.⁷ With the onset of the Revolutionary War, the Continental Congress asked Pennsylvania and Connecticut to end hostilities at Wyoming, and for a time the attention of both was turned to the larger conflict.⁸

But in 1782 Pennsylvania contested Connecticut's claim to the Valley before a Federal tribunal at Trenton under the provision of the Articles of Confederation for handling interstate disputes. The court decided in favor of Pennsylvania, but it said that the question of private title to the land was another thing, and the commissioners who sat in judgment at Trenton recommended privately to the governor of Pennsylvania that the Connecticut settlers ought to be granted their holdings or be compensated.⁹

The Pennsylvania government, influenced by some of its own citizens who claimed title to the area, refused to be lenient with the Connecticut claimants and sent authorities and troops to the Valley to dispossess them. As a result bitter strife for a time again ensued.¹⁰ To strengthen its position, the Susquehannah Company proceeded to offer a half-share of land to any settler who would go to the Valley *with arms* and agree to stay there three years.¹¹ The Company was de-

terminated to force Pennsylvania out of necessity or weariness to grant their full claims or make a satisfactory compromise.

Under this impetus, settlement boomed from 1784-86, many "half-share" men taking advantage of the offer. As these men began to form a sizable proportion of the population of the Valley, the chances that the Pennsylvanian government would satisfy the settlers in their payments diminished. Those who had come before the Trenton decree in 1782 had at least a plausible claim. The subsequent settlers, in the eyes of Pennsylvania, had no claim whatsoever.¹²

It was while affairs were in this uneasy state that Timothy Pickering became involved in the problem. Pickering had sympathized with the Wyoming people at the time of the Indian Massacre of 1778, but he had never seen the region.¹³ In 1785, however, dissatisfied with his commission business and seeking better to provide for his rapidly increasing family, Pickering was attracted to a land investment opportunity in the Valley. He joined with a number of Philadelphia merchants and investors in purchasing from the State a 120,000 acre tract around the Great Bend of the Susquehannah River near the New York State line which embraced part of the Wyoming Valley. Pickering's share was 10,000 acres, which cost him a shilling per acre.¹⁴

At first Pickering was undecided as to his plans for his new lands. He hoped to attract settlers there from New England and considered making a trip to Salem for that purpose. He thought of moving to the lands that he might help to develop them and increase their value. But as yet he was not ready to take such a drastic step.¹⁵

In the late summer of the following year (1786), Pickering decided to make a trip to investigate his purchase in the Great Bend. He appears to have been disturbed by the tur-

moil over land titles and realized that the value of his investment was hazarded by the continuance of this dispute; therefore, he was interested in getting on-the-spot information that might point to a solution of the problem.¹⁶

Pickering has left a journal of his first visit to Wyoming which shows that he was quickly satisfied as to the material value of his lands and proceeded to spend most of his time gathering information from the inhabitants as to their condition and grievances.¹⁷ He had no axe to grind save a desire to bring peace to the Valley; he assumed that his own lands were uncontestable, for they were unsettled and had been obtained under a Pennsylvania title.

The lands settled by the Connecticut people did concern him, however. Whether it was his sense of justice, his sympathy awakened for the Wyoming settlers at the time of the Massacre of 1778, his ancient dislike of the Pennsylvania government stemming from the State's inefficiency and lack of cooperation in the Revolution, or merely what seemed to him the only practical solution, Pickering felt from the start that the Connecticut people who had settled in the Valley before the Trenton decision deserved to be allowed to retain their developed lands. Where these lands were claimed by Pennsylvania holders, compensation should be made to the latter out of some of the State's vast lands farther to the West.¹⁸ Pickering never swerved from this early belief.

While at Wyoming, Pickering attended a meeting of the people of the Valley at which they discussed what stand they ought to take on their land claims. They were divided into those who would "contend warmly" for the whole purchase and those who merely desired confirmation of their farms. The former group consisted of the half-share men and those older settlers who had large shares in the Susquehannah

Company. The leaders of this faction in Wyoming were Colonel John Franklin and Major John Jenkins, both leading officers of the Militia and stockholders of the Company. Franklin, described as a "man of Herculean frame," and a passionate, natural leader,¹⁹ had been a leading defender of the region against the Indians during the Revolutionary War, as well as its leader since the peace. He was very hospitable to Pickering, little suspecting the two would later be bitter antagonists. The settlers decided to press Pennsylvania for confirmation of their whole claim but to stand ready to compromise for something less.²⁰

These investigations of Pickering's at Wyoming must have convinced him that confirmation of the farms of the pre-Trenton settlers would be sufficient to bring peace to the Valley, for upon his return he decided to move there and accept a number of county offices. Wyoming had just been organized by the Legislature into Luzerne County, and the problem of administering the county under the laws of Pennsylvania now had to be faced.²¹

Pickering was urged by Benjamin Rush and James Wilson to apply for appointment as representative of the State government in Luzerne. These men were interested in land ventures there, wanted to speed peaceful settlement of the Wyoming dispute, and saw in Colonel Pickering a man of moderation who would likely succeed in the task.²² Pickering was named to the necessary offices by the Council and the Assembly in a manner that suggested some political trickery on the part of his supporters. Rush urged Pickering to contact the favorable councilors secretly and persuade them to attend the session on the morrow and the appointments would be hurried through while the opposition was off guard.²³ Pickering followed this advice and on the following

day was named prothonotary and judge of the Court of Common Pleas, Clerk of the Court of Sessions, and Clerk of the Orphans Court—the duties and income of the jobs being so slight as to recommend their being combined in the hands of one individual. Shortly thereafter, Pickering was named by the Assembly Register of Wills and Recorder of Deeds, which combined with his other offices gave him a prospect of a fair income as the business of the County would grow. Most important of all, Pickering was charged with the task of reconciling the inhabitants to Pennsylvania rule—he accepted the responsibility under the assumption that the State was ready to confirm the claims of the pre-Trenton settlers.²⁴

Pickering spent the next couple of months preparing for his new tasks. He embarked on his official duties in January, 1787, journeying on horseback over 120 miles of rocky roads to the lovely Valley that was soon to be the scene of many tribulations for him.²⁵ At Wyoming he immediately set to work to convince the people that it was to their interest to show a cooperative attitude towards the Pennsylvanian government; by swearing obedience to her laws, they would surely induce the authorities in the Legislature to confirm them in their land holdings. Pickering was careful not to promise the impossible: he said there was no chance of the unsettled lands or the lands of the post-Trenton settlers being confirmed and even the old settlers would have to pay a small sum to help reimburse the rival Pennsylvania claimants. However, he assured them that if they tried to hold out for better terms they would probably antagonize Pennsylvania into giving them nothing. He declared that Pennsylvania would not be toyed with, that she had ample power to put down any resistance.²⁶

Two steps had to be taken to bring the Wyoming people

into the political and legal fold of Pennsylvania: first, they had to swear allegiance to the State and, secondly, elect representatives to the State legislature. The majority of the inhabitants were willing to be swayed by Pickering's logic, but the vociferous minority of half-share men and Company stockholders were active in opposing the oath, the election, and any trusting in the word of the Pennsylvanian government.²⁷

This latter group was not making just a bluff to force concessions; past experience had given them no reason to trust the word of the State officials. This attitude of distrust and hostility was supplemented by their hopes of speculative gain. And what is more, there was something else to the picture. These were the "Critical Years" of the American experiment; the future of the Union, the sanctity of the original states was being questioned: Western Massachusetts was aflame with agitation,²⁸ New York and New Hampshire were claiming an area that insisted it belonged to neither and claimed independence as the State of Vermont. North Carolina was contending with a rebellion in its western area, where the so-called independent state of Franklin had been erected in 1784. Why then, it was felt by the Susquehannah Company people, should not Wyoming assert its independence? The whole investment would then be made good and no control by the hated Pennsylvanians would have to be tolerated.²⁹ Thus it was important, first of all, that the extremists thwart Colonel Pickering's attempt to saddle them with the law of Pennsylvania.

Faced with determined opposition, Pickering had his work cut out for him. However, he traveled from town to town in the Valley throughout the month of January and talked to groups of settlers, informally or in meetings, advising them

of the wisdom of trusting in the Pennsylvania government. He was confronted by the people with many questions and accusations: some demanded that confirmation precede their oath of allegiance; some warned that the confirmation would be repealed as soon as they had committed themselves. Pickering had answers for these and others: if he was accused of being a stooge of the Pennsylvania claimants, he showed that he was buying some Connecticut title land for his home and was moving his family there; if they expressed their fears of lawsuits under Pennsylvania law, Pickering answered that their best hope for justice lay in accepting Pennsylvania authority and citizenship and electing their own representatives to the Legislature to protect their interests.³⁰

It is not surprising that an independent frontier society was adverse to taking on law and order, when the latter came from without and was directed by former enemies, nor was it easy for such a people to accept the decisions of a new and distant court (Trenton) that supposedly denied their right to the lands which they alone had lived on and had worked on for years. That Pickering was able to win over the majority of them despite the efforts of the Franklin faction may have been due less to his persuasiveness than to the weariness of the people after years of fruitless resistance. Some were still fiery enough to defy Pennsylvania to "saddle" them with its laws, but most of them were "'more afraid of the *halter* than the *saddle*.'" ³¹

Consequently a sufficient number took the oath of allegiance by February 1 that the election could be held and representatives to the Legislature named. The Susquehannah Company's forces had hoped to prevent this election, but the day passed rather quietly and when the count of the votes was completed at two o'clock the next morning, Luzerne

County had its first elected officers and representatives—heading the list was the name of John Franklin, who was named the delegate to the lower house—an odd situation for one who had been denying the authority of Pennsylvania over the territory.³² Franklin responded by asking leave not to attend the first session because of the pressure of his own “domestic affairs” (“domestic affairs” indeed!).³³

Now Pickering proceeded to draw up a petition for the people to submit to the Legislature through their representative, requesting that they be confirmed in their lands settled before the Trenton decree.³⁴ Such a petition, of course, would not be pleasing to the “half-share” faction, and this group was now being whipped into action by Franklin, ready to adopt forceful measures to offset the powers of the ballot. Copies of the petition were sent around the Valley for the acquisition of signatures, but Franklin, claiming “he had rather See Human Blood Run as Deep over the Land as The Waters Did Last fall in The Great flood Than to have Seen So many Signers to That Petition,” directed a riot at the town of Kingston whereby one of the petitions was seized, Pickering’s name was placed upon it, and it was committed to the flames accompanied with lusty curses.³⁵

Nonetheless, the petitions were sent forward to Philadelphia in March and, in the absence of Colonel Franklin, were presented to the Legislature by Colonel Dennison, Luzerne’s Council representative.³⁶ The Legislature now was in a mood to settle the vexing issue and without much delay passed a measure confirming the pre-Trenton settlers in their lands and promising compensation to the Pennsylvania title holders of the same land. Three Commissioners were named to pass on the settlers’ claims for confirmation, Pickering being named one of them.³⁷ His promise to the Wyoming people

had been fulfilled, yet his troubles were only beginning.

Franklin's forces, which had little to gain from confirmation of the pre-Trenton settlement, now became more violent as their position worsened. They preceeded to dominate town meetings and discouraged to some extent the peaceful minded men from attending.³⁸ Letters arrived from Connecticut urging the settlers to stand firm, resist the "artful" Pickering, and await reinforcements which would soon arrive.³⁹

The moderate faction did not intend to be deprived of the Pennsylvania concessions, so they moved to resist Franklin's violence. In April they formed themselves into an association—that frontier instrument of law and order—mutually to protect the government, its laws, and their own "lives and liberties and . . . the property which we have a right to enjoy agreeably to the laws of Pennsylvania. . . ."⁴⁰

A test of the two factions was to come with the elections for the Justice of the Peace which Pickering was now determined to carry out. The Franklin forces were equally determined to prevent it. Rumors reached Pickering that he and the district election officer were to be kidnapped to thwart the election; he proceeded to name a deputy election officer and went ahead with the arrangements.⁴¹ On election day the Franklin group appeared in a body and so did the Association forces, but, instead of a clash resulting, the latter were so numerous as to deter Franklin from directing any riot, and the justices were quietly elected.⁴² Pickering was so encouraged by this success that he was rash enough to declare, "Franklin's career is at an end," and proceeded to make arrangements for moving his family to Wyoming at the end of May.⁴³

Unfortunately for Wyoming, John Franklin did not readily

accept Pickering's verdict that his career was "at an end." Egged on by the leaders in Connecticut who taunted his forces as being cowardly and allowing themselves to be deprived of their claims "without the flash of a Single Rifle, or any of the least resistance . . .,"⁴⁴ Franklin set up his headquarters at Newtown across the line in New York State and made plans for more drastic action.⁴⁵

Meanwhile, developments in the State legislature were taking a suspicious turn. Pickering's loyal friend, Hodgdon, reported early in June from Philadelphia that seemingly "every art is trying to embroil afresh this happily terminated dispute."⁴⁶ A number of the Pennsylvania title holders were not satisfied with the confirming act, even though provision for compensating them was stipulated. This group proceeded to work against the carrying out of the confirming act and so found themselves on the same side of the fence as their erstwhile bitter enemies, the Franklin faction. There is no evidence that the two collaborated as a result of this coincidence, but with two such groups in strong opposition to the act, administration was bound to be difficult.⁴⁷

It probably was due in part at least to Pennamite influence that in May William Montgomery was named as the third commissioner reviewing the Wyoming claims, replacing General Heister. This Montgomery had incurred the bitter resentment of the Wyoming people by enforcing the law against them in 1783 in what seemed a rather high-handed manner.⁴⁸ Whether their resentment had been justly taken or not, the fact that it existed at all should have persuaded the government to make a more prudent choice at this time.

Pickering, who had previously shown tact in dealing with the Wyoming problem, failed to appreciate the shortsightedness of Montgomery's selection and thought he would make a

good commissioner.⁴⁹ Protests over the appointment were, of course, vigorous, and Franklin, taking advantage of a new issue, fanned the flames and created a threatening situation.⁵⁰

As yet the Commissioners had not begun their hearings to confirm the claims of the Connecticut people; various delays, especially that occasioned by Montgomery's replacement of Heister and the suspicious disappearance of his commission en route from the government, prevented the commissioners from meeting before late August. Even the moderate people had become suspicious over the delay, fearing that the time limit would lapse before their claims would be heard and approved. Throughout the Valley, a renewed tendency to disrespect law and order was apparent.⁵¹ Finally, Pickering and the second commissioner, Balliol, decided to go ahead without Montgomery and thus upset Franklin's calculations; so on August 26, 1787, they began to hear claims. Unfortunately they couldn't issue final patents until they had been approved by the assembly, so that until this took place the State's integrity still hung in the balance.⁵²

Numerous rumors reached Pickering of a conspiracy that was ripening and likely to break loose about his head at any moment. Forces were said to be gathering across the border in New York State where troublesome leaders in that state were joining with the Franklin crowd.⁵³ Pickering was warned that he was "to be driven back through the swamp . . ." and, though he felt such rumors to be incredible, he kept on his guard and was prepared to shoot down any assailants.⁵⁴ However, the plot was no longer a mere rumor when, in October, one of the Susquehannah Company's messengers was seized carrying a copy of a proposed Constitution for a new state in Wyoming to be called Westmoreland. Little wonder one of the Franklin leaders is reported

to have said at this ill stroke of fortune: "Oh, Hell! Hell! Hell! —They have now got the whole of it."⁵⁵ The State government was finally aroused by these developments to issue an order for Franklin's arrest on the grounds of attempting a breach of the peace by denying Pennsylvania's jurisdiction in Luzerne County and by inciting and encouraging citizens to disobey the laws.⁵⁶

Meanwhile, Franklin, advised to "crush . . . [his] enemies and pursue them to the Pitt," gave orders for his followers to meet armed and equipped in Wilkes-Barre on the 9th of October.⁵⁷ But before Franklin could consummate whatever plans these preparations implied, he was a prisoner of the State on his way to jail in Philadelphia. He had come to Wilkes-Barre not suspecting arrest and had been seized by Colonel Butler and his three associates. Franklin, being a powerful fellow, put up quite a resistance and his captors were forced to send to Pickering for help. The latter has described what then happened: "I took loaded pistols in my hands, and went with another servant to their aid. Just as I met them, Franklin threw himself off from his horse, and renewed his struggle with them. His hair was dishevelled and face bloody, from preceding efforts. I told the gentlemen they would never carry him off, unless his feet were tied under his horse's belly. I sent for a cord. The gentlemen remounted him, and my servant tied his feet. Then, one taking his bridle, another following behind, and the others riding one on each side, they whipped up his horse, and were soon beyond the reach of his friends."⁵⁸

One sees here not the peaceful arbitrator who first came to Wyoming, but rather the stern defender of law and order. Pickering's attitude seemed to have changed after the elections in the early part of the year had represented to him

acceptance of law on the part of the settlers. Franklin's continued opposition thereafter stiffened his attitude and finally provoked him to level the arm of punishment.

Franklin's seizure did not end the disturbance; instead it invited further trouble. When Franklin's forces, assembled nearby, heard of their leader's arrest and Pickering's role in it, they set out to retaliate on the latter. Pickering was apprised of this danger and heeded advice to hide away until the fury spent itself. When friends, posted as sentinels around his home, reported that Franklin's men were crossing the river a short distance away, Pickering grabbed a pistol, a few crackers, and stole off to a nearby field, leaving his friends to stay by his wife and their three-weeks old baby. Anxious moments must have passed for him as the mob descended on his house; during the commotion one of his friends escaped and joined him, and they decided to seek safer cover in the woods. They spent the night on Wilkes-Barre Mountain, and the next day, after receiving advice from Mrs. Pickering to continue in hiding, they decided to make their way to Philadelphia and apprise the government of the situation. Their escape was not easy, as the Franklin boys were posted to look for them; luck, courage, and good judgment enabled them to avoid the sentries and reach a farmhouse twenty-five miles away, where they obtained horses that took them to Philadelphia.⁵⁹ Before leaving the farm, Pickering wrote a letter to the besiegers cautioning them against any mistreatment of Mrs. Pickering and advising them to renounce their foolish allegiance to Franklin, whom he promised would have a fair trial.⁶⁰

The group that raided Pickering's house proved to be of fairly gentle fibre—none of his family were molested in any way and in a short while the rioters were petitioning for a

pardon, excusing their action on their love for Franklin. However, it was not until January of 1788 that it was deemed safe for Pickering to return to Wyoming, though in the meantime this region elected him its delegate to the State Convention called to ratify the Constitution.⁶¹

The opponents of the confirming law in the Legislature made use of the renewed agitation and violence in Wyoming to question the wisdom of conferring charity upon a disorderly people. Proposals were seriously considered to amend the law, such as reducing the size of Luzerne County and the territory to which the confirming law would be applied. These were ominous signs, and Pickering protested against any change being made, fearing that such change would be construed by the settlers as the "prelude to a total repeal of the law. . . ."⁶²

At the same time, too, the Pennsylvania title holders were stirring up trouble over the compensation section of the law, demanding that they be given either cash outright, interest paying bonds, or the lands themselves and not other lands to the westward as was proposed. The opposition contributed to the dissatisfaction with the act, and a real danger arose that the law might be repealed.⁶³

In spite of these bad signs, the situation in the Valley became quieter, possibly because Franklin was no longer around to stir up trouble. Pickering had been advised not to return until State troops were stationed in the area, but on December 31, 1787, the Council promised to send troops "in good time," and Pickering set out at once for Wyoming and prepared to resume the hearings with the other Commissioners.⁶⁴

During the next few months Pickering was able to devote considerable attention to his own affairs—chief of which was

finishing the construction of his house. Franklin's men were behaving well; some of them sat on the juries at the county court, and all seemed to be accepting law and order.⁶⁵ The peace of the Valley was not reflected in the State legislature, however, and on March 20, 1788, the confirming act was suspended, the matter having been brought to a crisis by the compensation-seeking Pennamites.⁶⁶ Sam Hodgdon, writing from Philadelphia, advised the people to adopt the motto, "Steady, boys, steady," and for a time, at least, the Valley people displayed commendable calm.⁶⁷

Gradually, lawless outbreaks of the Franklin forces arose again; half-share men forcibly took possession of some land held by settlers under Pennsylvania title.⁶⁸ Pickering got wind that a new plot was stirring against him and word was dropped that it would be best for him to leave voluntarily.⁶⁹ Franklin's followers were working hard to obtain their leader's release on bail—a prospect that frightened Pickering; the court agreed to his release and the necessary surety was obtained, only to have the Council step in and forbid his discharge.⁷⁰

This rebuff when linked with other circumstances was bound to have serious consequences for Pickering. Franklin was an unusually popular man;⁷¹ he had become seriously ill in jail and had recently written to his followers that unless he was released soon he would surely die there. Pickering, however, was very desirous that Franklin not be released under any circumstances, and he wrote a letter to this effect to the Council. Unfortunately this letter was intercepted by the Franklin men.⁷² Now fearing for their leader's life, they determined to force Pickering to secure his release or suffer the consequences.

At eleven o'clock on the evening of the 26th of June,

Pickering was awakened by the violent entry into his room by a weird band of men with blackened faces, some carrying tomahawks. The startled Pickering was ordered to get up and quickly dress. He reached for his coat but suddenly realized it contained letters uncomplimentary to the Franklin Party leaders and quickly dropped it for a fustian jacket. His wife was allowed to get him an overcoat, though she was warned that if she uttered a sound she would be tomahawked. Pickering's arms were pinioned, his hands tied behind his back, and he was tied to a leash and led off. The band passed through Wilkes-Barre "in perfect silence" and did not stop till several miles beyond the town; after a brief rest they marched on for ten miles "thro' pathless woods" in "the darkness and stillness of the night."⁷³ There were about fifteen men in the group and they surrounded him as they marched; they made clear their intentions by telling him that if he would write for and obtain Franklin's release, they would release him. He not only refused but said Franklin was a traitor; this brought forth the retort from one of them, "'Damn him, . . . why don't you tomahawk him?'"⁷⁴

After stopping briefly at a friendly tavern in Pittstown, the group pushed on through the woods. Arriving at the Lackawanna River, they crossed in a canoe. To get ashore, Pickering was about to step into the water when one of the fellows waded out and carried him ashore on his back. On they went through woods, across streams, pausing now and then for rest, getting drenched by rains, and then nervously pushing on again to avoid their pursuers, for word had arrived that the militia had been sent out to track them down.⁷⁵

It became necessary for most of the men to fan out into the woods as scouts while five remained guard over Pickering. As they moved along, a startled fawn bounded along in

front of them, and the leader took quick aim and shot him. He quickly skinned him, threw the carcass on his back, and resumed the march. Shortly, however, they stopped, built a fire, and soon were broiling venison steaks. The leader tended his steak with particular care, salted it, and when it was done, he presented it to Pickering, "with a very good grace."⁷⁶

Eventually the party established a campsite, and though from time to time they moved it, Pickering no longer had to endure the fatigue of constant travel. However, Pickering was now to suffer a new discomfort. In retaliation for Franklin's having been chained in jail, the men now put a band around Pickering's ankle with a chain attached to it and drove the other end of the chain into a tree.⁷⁷ This was Pickering's situation when he wrote in his scrap of a journal, "4th July . . . The anniversary of the declaration of independence! The birthday of American Freedom! All America rejoicing—but *I* am in chains!!!"⁷⁸

Gradually Pickering began to feel that there was little danger of any harm befalling him, and he patiently waited for his captors to become aware of the impossibility of their venture succeeding. One day the militia encountered one of the outposts and exchanged shots with "the boys," wounding one of them in the hand but suffering a serious wound to their leader in return.⁷⁹ The rebels showed signs of weakening on July 15th, asking, as a condition of release, that Pickering intercede for Franklin's pardon; when refused this, they asked that Pickering intercede for their own pardon. He replied that he would do so only on the condition that they give the names of their top leaders. They demurred at this but were anxious to reach some bargain. They released him from chains and took him to their headquarters, where he was allowed to shave for the first time in 19 days; they gave

him clean clothing and "roasted some chickens, and gave me as good a dinner as the poor wretches could furnish."⁸⁰

The most Pickering was willing to concede was to forgive his captors the damages they caused him in exchange for a pledge that they would wholeheartedly obey the laws of Pennsylvania. He also agreed to draft a letter for them, in which they asked for pardon, and convey it to the State government in Philadelphia. This done, Pickering obtained a canoe and set off down the river to Wilkes-Barre where he arrived next day, ending his twenty-one days' adventure.⁸¹

Pickering felt little mercy towards his captors and, in sending forward their petition of pardon to the President of the Council, he suggested that it might be used against the "ruffians."⁸² At the same time he sent out two men to try to track down the culprits, for the State had posted rewards of \$300 for the capture of the ringleaders and \$100 for that of each of the participants. However, their hunt was unsuccessful.⁸³

Eventually some of the fugitives were captured and brought to trial; most of the others escaped to remoter frontiers beyond the reach of the law.⁸⁴ The State decided only to try the men for a riot, and the trial accordingly took place before a jury in Luzerne County in November, 1788. Most of the participants were merely fined, but a few of the leaders were given brief jail sentences in addition. The Chief Justice of Pennsylvania sat on the bench during this trial, and at its conclusion he reminded the defendants that in any country in Europe they would have been hanged and that it was only "the mildness of the government of Pennsylvania" that let them off so lightly; he also commended the jury and the people for their good behavior and promised to make the Assembly aware of it.⁸⁵ John Franklin remained in jail for some

time; he was never brought to trial, however, and on January 9, 1792, he received a full pardon.⁸⁶ This victory of the State over the insurgents of Wyoming did not bring full peace to the Valley, for the State continued to suspend the confirming act and finally in March, 1790, antagonized the settlers by totally repealing it.⁸⁷

These embittered people, aware now that their strength was insufficient for active revolt, united in a policy of passive resistance. They refused to be moved from their lands, and eventually in 1799 the weary legislature yielded to common sense and confirmed the lands in exchange for a nominal payment.⁸⁸ But the damage had been done; and while the years passed with the Valley torn by this unsettled dispute, the tide of westward migration flowed around this troubled spot to calmer regions adjoining and beyond. When peace was finally established,⁸⁹ more fertile lands were beckoning in the West and South, so that the Valley remained a laggard until a later generation moved the beggar off his black gold mine, and the extraction of anthracite coal opened a new chapter in the Valley's history.⁹⁰

Following the trial of his kidnappers, Pickering was largely freed of the danger of personal attack, and with the activities of the land commissioners suspended (and soon repealed), he had time to devote himself to the development of his lands and the minor duties of his numerous public offices. The repeal of the confirming act inevitably made his position in the Valley uncomfortable, for he had assured the people that the State could be trusted.⁹¹ He continually urged the government to confirm the pre-Trenton claims,⁹² and he later joined the other Connecticut claimants in bringing suit in court, though unsuccessfully, for confirmation of their titles.⁹³

Understandably, Pickering's interest in remaining in Wyo-

ming began to diminish. His investments in land were not turning out well, largely because of the effect of the disturbances on the development of the region, and the income from his county offices was meager indeed; in fact, he had acquired only \$50 in cash from them in three years.⁹⁴ Thus in 1789 he turned his eyes back to Philadelphia, where the new government under the Constitution was being established with his friends from war days, George Washington and Alexander Hamilton, at the helm. He began to make overtures for an appointment in the new federal government and before long he was to be called into service to fill in turn the responsible offices of Indian Commissioner (1790-1795), Postmaster General (1791-1795), Secretary of War (1795), and Secretary of State (1795-1800). Back to Philadelphia then went the erstwhile Quartermaster General and Wyoming Commissioner; a highly important Federalist career lay ahead.

EDWARD HAKE PHILLIPS

NOTES

1. The writer has traced Pickering's early career in an unpublished doctoral thesis, *The Public Career of Timothy Pickering, Federalist, 1745-1801*, submitted in February, 1950, to Harvard University. The principal source for Pickering's activities is the Pickering Manuscripts in the Massachusetts Historical Society, consisting of 62 volumes of original material. For a fair summary of Pickering's life, see the essay on Pickering in Henry Cabot Lodge's *Studies in History* (Boston, 1884). At this time (1785) Pickering was 40 years old.
2. Pickering to Elbridge Gerry, Feb. 20, 1784, Pickering Mss., Massachusetts Historical Society (hereafter cited as P-MHS), V, 320-1.
3. Extracts from a journal of Pickering's, August, 1786, P-MHS, LVII, 31. The actual Wyoming Valley was limited to an area 20 miles long by 3 miles wide, centering around Wilkes-Barre, but the larger area involved in the dispute—i.e., the area claimed by Susquehanna Co.—which measured 120 miles long by 20

miles wide—was loosely called “Wyoming,” and I shall use the term to embrace this larger area.

4. W. L. Stone, *The Poetry and History of Wyoming*, 3rd edition (Albany, 1864), 211–3 and 229–34.
5. For the early history of the Connecticut claims, see the anonymous tract entitled “Connecticut Claims,” P-MHS, LVII, 1–5. See also W. H. Egle, comp., “Documents Relating to the Connecticut Settlement in the Wyoming Valley,” *Pennsylvania Archives*, Second Series (Harrisburg, 1890), XVIII, 3, 41, and 46. Also Timothy Pickering, *Wyoming: A Letter from Colonel Pickering, Containing a Narrative of the Outrage Committed on Him in Wyoming . . .* (Salem, 1819), 9.
6. *Pennsylvania Archives*, Second Series, XVIII, 3 and 22; Elsie Murray, *Te-a-o-ga: Annals of a Valley* (Athens, Pa., 1939), 22.
7. Pickering, *Wyoming*, 11; Pickering, Notes, undated, P-MHS, LVIII, 237–8.
8. Pickering, *Wyoming*, 12.
9. Pickering to Wm. Rawle, March 6, 1790, P-MHS, LVIII, 223; Welcome Arnold to Pickering, March 20, 1793, P-MHS, LVIII, 321. (Arnold was one of the Commissioners.)
10. Pickering, *Wyoming*, 13. See also the vivid description in J. B. McMaster, *A History of the People of the United States from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York, 1897), I, 210–6.
11. *Pennsylvania Archives*, Second Series, XVIII, 106; and Pickering to John Pickering, March 27, 1787, P-MHS, V, 404.
12. Murray, *Te-a-o-ga*, 44.
13. Pickering to Zeb. Butler, July 10 and July 15, 1778, P-MHS, V, 88 and 89.
14. Pickering to P. Sargeant, June 11, 1785, P-MHS, XXXIV, 318; Pickering to Mrs. Sarah Clarke, Aug. 16, 1796, P-MHS, XXXVI, 199. Among Pickering’s associates in the venture were his friends Hodgdon, Tench Francis, and Tench Cox.
15. Pickering to P. Sargeant, June 11, 1785, P-MHS, XXXIV, 318.
16. Pickering to J. Gardner, March 9, 1786, P-MHS, XXXV, 3; Pickering’s Journal, August–September, 1786, *Ibid.*, LVII, 31.
17. Journal, *Ibid.*, LVII, 31–32.
18. Memorandum of Pickering’s, undated (though probably September, 1786), *Ibid.*, LVII, 34–7.
19. Louise W. Murray, *A History of Old Tioga Point and Early Athens, Pennsylvania* (Athens, Pa., 1938), 266.
20. Pickering’s Journal, August–September, 1786, P-MHS, LVII, 31–32. The active leaders of the Susquehannah Company at the time of the revolt seem to have been Dr. Joseph Hamilton, Dr. Caleb Benton, Ethan Allen, Zerah Beach, Col. John McKinstry,

John Hyde, and John Franklin. One of the New York Livingstons, John, was also connected with this group at this time.

Franklin seems to have been the only figure high in the company who was also a resident of the valley.

21. Pickering, *Wyoming*, 13.
22. *Ibid.*, 14.
23. Benjamin Rush to Pickering, Oct. 8, 1786, P-MHS, XIX, 81.
24. Pickering to John Clarke, Oct 11, 1786, P-MHS, V, 395; Pickering to John Pickering, Nov. 15, 1786, P-MHS, XXXV, 14-5.
25. Pickering's Journal, January, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 38-41.
26. Journal, *Ibid.*, 41-8.
27. Journal, *Ibid.*, 52-7.
28. The Wyoming leaders hoped that the Shaysites would either succeed in Massachusetts and improve the cause of frontiersmen everywhere or, if unsuccessful, flee to Wyoming. Dr. Timothy Hosmer to Capt. Schott, Feb. 2, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 123.
29. Wm. Judd to Col. Butler, Jan. 11, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 89. Judd, a director of the Company, said, ". . . [T]he federal government is on its last legs . . . providence helps them that help themselves." *Ibid.*, 89.
30. Pickering's Journal, January 22, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 62-9.
31. Journal, *Ibid.*, 69.
32. Journal, Feb. 1, 1787, *Ibid.*, 79-80.
33. Franklin to the General Assembly of Pennsylvania, Feb. 24, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 143.
34. Copy of the petition of the Wyoming inhabitants to the Assembly, February, 1787. P-MHS, LVII, 80.
35. Pickering's Journal, February, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 138.
36. Col. Dennison to the Speaker of the Assembly, Mar. 5, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 146.
37. The other commissioners were Peter Muhlenburg and General Heister. Extracts from the Minutes of the General Assembly of Pennsylvania, Mar. 17, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 147; *Pennsylvania Archives*, Second Series, XVIII, 660-5.
38. Hooker Smith to Pickering, Feb. 21, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 138.
39. Wm. Judd to the Inhabitants of Wyoming, a broadside letter "brought into the settlement about the 13th of April, 1787," P-MHS, LVII, 167.
40. Copy of the contract of association of the Wyoming settlers, made by Pickering, April, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 150.
41. Pickering to John Hagerman, Apr. 25, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 208-9.
42. Obad. Gore to Pickering, Apr. 20, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 178.
43. Pickering to Hodgdon, Apr. 28, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 215.
44. Dr. Jos. Hamilton to John Franklin, Sept. 10, 1787, P-MHS, LVII.

45. Pickering to Hodgdon, Aug. 9, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 245-7.
46. Hodgdon to Pickering, June 10, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 231.
47. Pickering to Hodgdon, Aug. 9, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 245. The Pennsylvania title-holders were called "Pennamites" by the Connecticut people, because they claimed title under the proprietorship of the Penn family. Their leaders were: Colonel Charles Stewart, Rev. Dr. Ewing (Provost of the State University), Rev. Dr. Smith (Provost of the College and Academy of Philadelphia), John Van Camp, Dr. Ledlie, and Garret Brodhead (the latter three described by Pickering as "sworn enemies to the Connecticut settlers"—Pickering to Spaulding, Sept. 26, 1787, P-MHS, VI, 15). Testimony of Mrs. B. Flower, Feb. 23, 1790, P-MHS, LVIII, 205; Pickering to Peter Anspach, Mar. 31, 1790, P-MHS, XXXV, 87; Pickering, *Wyoming*, 35-6.
48. Hodgdon to Pickering, July 25, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 239; Inhabitants of the County of Luzerne to the President and Council of Pennsylvania (undated, 1787), P-MHS, LVII, 228-9.
49. Pickering to Hodgdon, Aug. 9, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 247.
50. Pickering to Hodgdon, Aug. 12, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 250.
51. Pickering to Hodgdon, Aug. 9, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 247.
52. Pickering to Hodgdon, Aug. 26, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 261-2. Balliol had replaced Muhlenburg as the second commissioner.
53. *Ibid.*, 263-5.
54. *Ibid.*, 261-2.
55. Testimony of John Allen, Aug. 9, 1788, P-MHS, LVII, 226; Pickering to John Pickering, Nov. 17, 1787, P-MHS, XXXV, 26.
56. Thos. McKean to Col. Zeb. Butler, Sept. 1, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 271.
57. Caleb Benton to John Franklin, Aug. 9, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 279; Franklin to Jeh. Franklin, Sept. 25, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 303. The time and place of meeting were later changed to October 8 at Hanover. Franklin to Jeh. Franklin, Sept. 29, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 303.
58. Pickering, *Wyoming*, 20.
59. *Ibid.*, 20-3.
60. Pickering to John Swift, Oct. 4, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 306.
61. Pickering, *Wyoming*, 23. This seeming contradiction indicates not that the people were inconsistent but rather that the majority of citizens were unable to maintain law and order.
62. Pickering to the Speaker of the General Assembly, Nov. 22, 1787, P-MHS, V, 411.
63. Hodgdon to Pickering, Mar. 15, 1788, P-MHS, LVIII, 14-5; Pickering to Geo. Clymer, Nov. 1, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 332-3.
64. Muhlenburg to Pickering, Dec. 31, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 345; Pickering, *Wyoming*, 24.

65. Pickering to Hodgdon, Mar. 10, 1788, P-MHS, LVII, 11-2.
66. Geo. Clymer to Pickering, Mar. 15, 1788, P-MHS, XIX, 23.
That politics and sectional feeling were heavily involved in this vote is indicated by the fact that virtually the only support for the Confirming Act came from the three wealthy eastern counties of Philadelphia, Bucks, and Chester. The West solidly opposed the Act, but the eastern counties controlled the legislature.
Pennsylvania Archives, Second Series, XVIII, 655-7.
67. Hodgdon to Pickering, Mar. 20, 1788, P-MHS, LVIII, 18.
68. Pickering to Hodgdon, May 30, 1788, P-MHS, LVIII, 22-3.
69. Pickering, *Wyoming*, 24.
70. Thos. McKean and Jacob Rush to Pickering, May 10, 1788, P-MHS, LVIII, 31; Recognizance of bail for John Franklin, May 24, 1788, P-MHS, LVIII, 32-3; Hodgdon to Pickering, June 20, 1788, P-MHS, LVIII, 43.
71. Pickering to Benjamin Franklin, July 28, 1788, P-MHS, LVIII, 65.
72. Petition of John Hyde, Jr., *et al.*, July 15, 1788, P-MHS, LVIII, 55.
73. Pickering, *Wyoming*, 25-6; Pickering Memorandum (undated, 1790), P-MHS, LVIII, 234.
74. Pickering, *Wyoming*, 26.
75. *Ibid.*, 26-7.
76. *Ibid.*, 28.
77. *Ibid.*, 28-9.
78. Pickering's Journal, July 4, 1788, P-MHS, LVIII, 45.
79. Pickering, *Wyoming*, 29.
80. *Ibid.*, 30-2.
81. *Ibid.*, 31-3.
82. Pickering to Benjamin Franklin, July 29, 1788, P-MHS, LVIII, 64-5.
83. *Ibid.*, 65; Proclamation, July 8, 1788, P-MHS, LVIII, 53.
84. Mathias Hollenback to Pickering, Aug. 15, 1788, P-MHS, LVIII, 97.
85. Pickering to Hodgdon, Nov. 9, 1788, P-MHS, LVIII, 149-50.
86. Pickering, *Wyoming*, 34-5.
87. *Ibid.*, 36.
88. *Pennsylvania Archives*, Second Series, XVIII, 715-20.
89. Hodgdon to Pickering, Jan. 21, 1805, P-MHS, XLIII, 40.
90. Pickering, *Wyoming*, 37-8. One of Pickering's land associates, Tench Coxe, was one of the first to realize the possibilities of Wyoming's mineral wealth. He requested much information from Pickering as to the discoveries of coal in the area, which Pickering eagerly gave to him. Coxe to Pickering, Mar. 29, 1788, P-MHS, LVIII, 20-1; Pickering to Wm. Bingham, Apr. 9, 1789, P-MHS, VI, 6.

91. Pickering's Journal, January, 1787, P-MHS, LVII, 47 and 64.
92. Pickering was in Philadelphia at the time of the repeal, did what he could to prevent it, and was vexed by his failure. Many of the state's most influential leaders—Robert Morris, George Clymer, Thos. Fitzsimmons, William Rawle, and Richard Peters—protested the action to no avail. Pickering to Mrs. Pickering, Apr. 6 and 8, 1790, P-MHS, photostats of personal letters, 79–82.
93. Putnam Catlin to Pickering, Apr. 10, 1792, P-MHS, LXIII (un-numbered). This suit was finally decided against the Connecticut claimants in the famous case of *Van Horne Lessees v. Dorrance* in 1795 (2 Dallas 303, 1795). See also miscellaneous letters, P-MHS, LVIII, 309–43.
94. Pickering to George Williams, Nov. 24, 1789, P-MHS, VI, 20.